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New Jersey Association of School Librarians

**Testimony presented to the  
New Jersey State Board of Education  
September 20, 2006**

Good Afternoon President Hyndman, Vice President Aponte, Commissioner Davy and members of the Board. Thank you for this opportunity to address you today. My name is Mary Moyer and I am president of the New Jersey Association of School Librarians. We are an organization representing over 1000 School Library Media Specialists working in school libraries throughout the state of New Jersey. I am also the Media Specialist at Delsea Regional High School in Franklinville, Gloucester County, a high school with approximately 1300 students in grades 9 through 12.

Let me begin by expressing the appreciation of our organization and its members for the Board's recent adoption of new certification regulations for School Library Media Specialists. These new regulations will ensure that librarians entering schools in New Jersey will have the appropriate background in literature and media for children and young adults and be well prepared to collaborate with teachers in integrating literature as well as information technology into the curriculum.

My particular purpose in testifying today is to call for the requirement of a school library media specialist in every school in New Jersey. Presently, as you are no doubt aware, there is no such requirement in New Jersey statute or regulations. With the exception of schools in the Abbott districts, individual districts and schools are free to staff their school library with a certified SLMS, a teacher certified in another subject, a non certified person or even a parent volunteer.

We hear more stories every year of principals and administrators who are trying to cut costs by reducing or eliminating professional staff in the school library in the mistaken belief that they are not seriously affecting the delivery of quality education by such a move.

Levels of student achievement are front page news today and the calls for increased student success are not coming from the education community alone. Just this past summer, Governor Corzine and a group of New Jersey business leaders joined forces with education leaders to call for renewed effort to ensure that every high school graduate is prepared for college and work. They announced that New Jersey would join 22 other states in the American Diploma Project, a national initiative dedicated to aligning K-12



curriculum, standards, assessments and accountability policies with the demands of college and work.

In its publication, *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts*,<sup>1</sup> the American Diploma Project stresses that critical thinking skills, ability to find and assimilate information and data and formulate and articulate arguments are essential skills for success in post secondary education or the workplace.

Another business education partnership, The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, stresses a similar set of skills that students will have to master in order to compete effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. These skills include more than just mastery of content; they include ongoing learning and thinking skills, how to continue learning and how to be able to make effective and innovative use of information throughout their lives. 21<sup>st</sup> century workers will need to know how to collaborate, how to find information and share it and perhaps most importantly, how to use technology to find and learn new content and skills.<sup>2</sup>

School media centers are the hub of technological literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are the gateway to the vast quantity of new and ever changing information, data, news and resources. Professional school media specialists are the conductors for students and teachers through this gateway.

In this sea of information, one database resource, Jersey Clicks, currently funded by the NJ State Library, LSTA funds, and the Regional Library Cooperatives, provides students and teachers with access to quality, full-text magazine, journal, encyclopedia and other reference articles. School library media centers are the entry way for this resource and it is school library media specialists who guide students to this one-stop source of reliable information.

School libraries are also the repository of quality literature, the books that teach children the joy of reading and help them develop a lifelong love of books.

We know that well-endowed school libraries, staffed by certified school library media specialists result in increased student achievement. Recent professional research has reinforced these findings and even identified the particular functions of a professional school library media specialist that contribute to school achievement.<sup>3</sup>

Common findings of several statewide studies of the effect of school librarian media specialists include the following:

- \* Professionally-trained and credentialed school library media specialists do make a difference that affects student performance on achievement tests.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.achieve.org/files/ADPreport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=221&Itemid=116](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=221&Itemid=116)

<sup>3</sup> Proof of the Power: Recent Research on the Impact of School Library Media Programs on the Academic Achievement of U.S. Public School Students, ERIC Digest. <http://www.ericdigests.org/2002-2/proof.htm>



\* Library media specialists have a two-fold teaching role. They are teachers of students, facilitating the development of information literacy skills necessary for success in all content areas, and they are in-service trainers of teachers, keeping abreast of the latest information resources and technology.

\*Library media specialists also must embrace technology to be effective. They must ensure that school networks extend the availability of information resources beyond the walls of the LMC, throughout the building, and, in the best cases, into students' homes.<sup>4</sup>

Research also supports the conclusion that strong collaboration between the professional school librarian and classroom teachers is part of the increase in literacy and stronger test scores. These collaboration activities include:

- identifying useful materials and information for teachers,
- planning instruction cooperatively with teachers,
- providing in-service training to teachers, and
- teaching students both with classroom teachers and independently.<sup>5</sup>

This strong research makes it clear that even one school in New Jersey without a certified School Library Media Specialist is one school too many.

Today's meeting presents an especially timely opportunity for my testimony in light of the other items on your agenda: Improving the Quality of Early Literacy and an update on the Reading First program in New Jersey. Both of these issues relate directly to the significant role of the School Library Media Specialist.

The Report of the Governor's Task Force on Early Literacy Education presented to you today notes the importance of the library media specialist in the literacy development of young children. The New Jersey Reading First K-3 Instructional Design identifies coordinated library and teaching programs as part of its matrix. Both programs emphasize the value of quality age appropriate literature to successful reading.

For your convenience, attached to your copy of my testimony is a copy of the presentation of Dr Keith Curry Lance of his research at the 2002 White House Conference on School Libraries. Also attached is a list of six specific recommendations for you to consider with regard to this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. If you have any questions, I would be pleased to answer them.

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<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> White House Conference on School Libraries: What Research Tells Us About the Importance of School Libraries, Keith Curry Lance, Ph.D., Director, Library Research Service, Colorado State Library, [http://www.ims.gov/news/events/whitehouse\\_2.shtml#kcl](http://www.ims.gov/news/events/whitehouse_2.shtml#kcl)



### **Recommendations of the NJ Association of School Librarians**

1. Each school should have a well-supplied school library media center with sufficient square footage per student population including office space, work area and instructional areas. This should be a required component of all district school construction projects (new construction and renovation).
2. The school library media center must be a state-of-the-art facility with Internet access for student and staff use, networked computers, and cutting-edge technologies. The library collection should be managed with an automated circulation system along with yearly technical support contracts, and an electronic classroom in which to teach and provide practical experiences for research strategies in a technical environment.
3. All New Jersey school libraries should be staffed by a certified school library media specialist who teaches information literacy skills to students and collaborates with teachers to support the achievement of core curriculum content standards in all areas. Staffing should also include appropriate clerical personnel to assist the library media specialist. This individual must be professionally educated in a nationally accredited college program for school library media studies, be well-versed in information literacy standards and school library media and certified according to applicable New Jersey regulations.
4. The school library should have electronic access to databases, catalogs of other information agencies' holdings, networks that provide access to specialists in various fields, and interlibrary loan networks.
5. There should be a separate line item in each school's budget for the school library media center. The budget should be sufficient to allow for purchase of at least seven new books, online services, supplies and other materials per student each year, replacement of outdated or damaged materials and technical support. The budget of a school library media center should be for the developing, maintaining, and increasing the holdings that are related to individual schools, core curriculum content standards, and to promote literacy at all grade levels. School library media specialists should not be linked with technology coordinators on state forms or budget lines.
6. All district school libraries must have support and leadership from the State Department of Education. Local boards of education must receive the proper guidelines, instruction and or training to ensure that they will support strong school libraries as a mechanism to enhance early literacy, strengthen information skills and boost overall student achievement and success.



## **June 4, 2002, White House Conference on School Libraries**

### **What Research Tells Us About the Importance of School Libraries**

**Keith Curry Lance, Ph.D.**

**Director, Library Research Service**

**Colorado State Library**

[http://www.ims.gov/news/events/whitehouse\\_2.shtm#kcl](http://www.ims.gov/news/events/whitehouse_2.shtm#kcl)

During the 2000-01 school year, Williams Intermediate School in Davenport, Iowa, improved use of its library dramatically. From one month to the next, circulation of library books and other materials doubled, sometimes even tripled. A survey of students found that there was a 3 percent increase in the number of students who indicated reading frequently rather than sometimes or never.

What difference did these changes make? Of tested 6th graders, 18 percent moved from needing improvement to meeting or exceeding reading standards. Test score improvements for Black and Hispanic students were even higher than for the general student population.

The big question is: how do improvements in school libraries contribute to such student progress?

In recent years, I have led several studies of the impact of school libraries and librarians on student performance, working with my colleagues Marcia Rodney and Christine Hamilton-Pennell. To date, we have completed such studies in six states: Alaska, Pennsylvania, and Colorado in 2000; Oregon and Iowa in 2001; and New Mexico just recently. All of these studies replicate and expand upon an earlier Colorado study, *The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement*. That study was completed by Lynda Welborn, Christine Hamilton-Pennell and me in 1992 and published in 1993.

The original Colorado study, as it is popularly known, found that the size of the library in terms of its staff and its collection is a direct predictor of reading scores. The amount of test score variation explained by this school library size factor ranged from five to 15 percent across various elementary and secondary grades and while controlling for a variety of other school and community differences. Indirect predictors of achievement included the presence of a professionally trained librarian who plays an active instructional role and higher levels of spending on the school library. Other indirect predictors included overall school spending per pupil and the teacher-pupil ratio. The lion's share of test score variation was explained, predictably, by socio-economic characteristics that identify at-risk students—namely, being from poor and minority families in which parents themselves did not excel academically.

#### **Recent Research**

Looking across the six studies we have completed most recently, three major sets of findings figure prominently. These findings concern:



- the level of development of the school library,
- the extent to which school librarians engage in leadership and collaboration activities that foster information literacy, and
- the extent to which instructional technology is utilized to extend the reach of the library program beyond the walls of the school library.

### **School Library Development**

The school library development factor developed in our more recent studies is an elaboration of the original study's school library size factor. School library development is defined by:

- the ratios of professional and total staff to students,
- a variety of per student collection ratios, and
- per student spending on the school library.

When school libraries have higher levels of professional and total staffing, larger collections of print and electronic resources, and more funding, students tend to earn higher scores on state reading tests.

In the aftermath of the original Colorado study, one of the more intriguing findings to many people was the one concerning the importance of school librarians playing a strong instructional role. To the disappointment of many practitioners, the earlier report did not define what that means, so they were uncertain how to act differently on the job. In our recent studies, we have succeeded in elaborating just what that instructional role involves.

### **Leadership**

In order to play an instructional role successfully, school librarians must exercise leadership to create the sort of working environment they need to help students and teachers succeed. Specific activities which define such leadership include:

- meeting frequently with the principal,
- attending and participating in faculty meetings,
- serving on standards and curriculum committees, and
- meeting with library colleagues at building, district, and higher levels.

Allison Hutchison, librarian at Bald Eagle Area High School in Wingate, Pennsylvania, is a good example of the school librarian in a leadership role:

In my school, she reports, the librarian is an integral part of the school steering committee which is made up of five area coordinators and other school leaders, such as the technology director. We meet monthly and together we make decisions about many building-wide policies, most importantly, future curriculum directions.

We review all curriculum proposals and decide which course changes and initiatives will be presented to the board. Not only do I get to provide input from my vantage point,



which takes in the school's curriculum as a whole, but I also get to know in advance which content areas to emphasize in collection development.

School librarians who serve as active leaders in their schools have a dramatic impact on teachers and students alike. Barbara St. Clair, librarian at Urbandale High School in Iowa, learned how quickly the impact of her leadership could be felt.

During the second week of school I visited every 9th grade classroom. I introduced students to the library and booktalked all 16 Iowa Teen Award books for this year. I keep them in a special place and as soon as one comes back it is checked out again, which makes me very happy. I gave each student a bookmark with the titles and each English teacher a poster about the books. Another English teacher at a different level said that he had heard that I gave really good book talks and asked me to pick out some books to present to his basic English class.

Since then, I have had more requests for booktalks. A teacher also requested that I arrange a panel of teachers to talk about their favorite books with her class.

### **Collaboration & Information Literacy**

When school librarians demonstrate this kind of leadership in their daily activities, they can create an environment conducive to collaboration between themselves and classroom teachers. That, in turn, enables them to work with classroom teachers to instill a love of reading and information literacy skills in their students.

Collaboration activities in which school librarians should participate, according to our research, include:

- identifying useful materials and information for teachers,
- planning instruction cooperatively with teachers,
- providing in-service training to teachers, and
- teaching students both with classroom teachers and independently.

It is these types of collaboration between librarians and teachers that are linked directly with higher reading scores.

Consider the example of Eaglecrest High School in Aurora, Colorado, reported by social studies teacher Debbe Milliser:

Our school librarians-Barbara Thorngren, Pat Holloway, and Norma Nixon-work with our U.S. History and American Literature classes to do a research project from start to finish. Individual language arts and social studies teaching teams meet with the librarians before bringing students to the library.

Students are taught the research process, including accessing and using both primary and secondary sources. My students' ability to access library books and other materials and to use information appropriately in their papers is very evident in the quality of their work. This project helps the juniors and seniors I teach to meet history, language arts, and library standards.



### **Technology**

Perhaps the most dramatic changes since the original Colorado study have been in the realm of instructional technology. More and more schools provide students and teachers with computer networks. At their best, school libraries are integrated into these networks in such a way that they enable school librarians to reach out more proactively to the school community. Such networks also enable students and teachers to use library media resources from wherever they are-in classrooms, labs, offices-even, in the best situations, from home.

In our recent studies, we have found that in schools where computer networks provide remote access to library resources, particularly the Web and licensed databases, test scores tend to be higher.

Becky Hickox, librarian at Silverton High School, reported to us on the impact of the Oregon School Library Information System.

A 9th grade health project has evolved into a partnership between Hickox and teacher Erik Cross to introduce freshmen to the Internet. The cornerstone of this project is introducing the licensed databases made available through OSLIS.

Although students often come with some knowledge of the World Wide Web, none of them are familiar with subscription databases. I provide the basic instruction and help individuals construct searches, she says, and Erik makes sure they are covering the required content.

This project introduces students to the concept of finding pertinent information as lifelong learners and gives them a base of search strategies for future projects in almost any subject area.

### **Controlling for School and Community Differences**

The most critical feature of the research design employed in our studies and in other recent studies based on the same design is controlling for other school and community differences. The earliest studies on school library impact failed to do this. As a result, those studies were subject to easy criticism.

The event that precipitated the first Colorado study is an excellent example of this dilemma. In a 1987 National Public Radio interview, the head of School Match, a Westerville, Ohio, data vendor, reported that researchers at his firm had identified school library spending-among a host of other variables-as the strongest predictor of scores on the National Merit Scholarship Test. But, when this claim was investigated, other researchers were not convinced. Perhaps it was not spending more on school libraries in particular, but spending more on everything-that is, simply being a rich school-that led to higher test scores.

To preclude the dismissal of such findings about the importance of school libraries, our research design controls for a variety of school and community differences.

The school differences included



- characteristics of teachers, such as their levels of education, experience, and compensation;
- the teacher-pupil ratio; and
- total per pupil expenditures.

The community differences included

- poverty,
- minority demographics, and
- adult educational attainment.

As a result, we have been able to demonstrate successfully in several diverse states that such differences do not explain away the importance of high-quality school libraries. Our research along these lines continues, currently in Michigan and California, and other states are in line to follow between now and 2004. Our methodology has been adapted by other researchers in studies of Massachusetts and Texas school libraries, yielding remarkably similar results to ours. Still other researchers are in the process of implementing our research design to study the impact of school libraries in other states.

At this point, however, there is a clear consensus in the results now available for eight states: School libraries are a powerful force in the lives of America's children. The school library is one of the few factors whose contribution to academic achievement has been documented empirically, and it is a contribution that cannot be explained away by other powerful influences on student performance.